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Culture in management from the perspective of cultural discourse in the social sciences

Abstract: *The development of the cultural concept of organization and management is a part of a broader thought concerning the study of culture in the social sciences and humanities. There are numerous complex relations between management and other sciences such as sociology, social psychology etc. The subject of the article is the historical analysis of a cultural trend in management in relation to changes in the theory of culture.*

Key words: *historia nurtu kulturowego, kultura w zarządzaniu, kultura organizacyjna, porównawcze badania kultury*

Introduction

The development of the cultural concept of organization and management is a part of a broader thought concerning the study of culture in the social sciences and humanities. There are numerous complex relations between management and other sciences examining culture. Organisation researchers draw from the works of sociology, cultural anthropology, social psychology, history, development economics and behavioural economics, cultural studies, linguistics and many other disciplines. At the same time, representatives of other scientific disciplines make use of the ideas and research located within the cultural discourse in management. The subject of the article is the historical analysis of a cultural trend in management in relation to changes in the theory of culture.

Concept of culture in science

Reflection on culture dates back to the 18th century, when the Romantic philosophers began to deal with civilisation's development, ideas of national cultures and the dichotomy between culture and science. A catalyst for the development of the concept of culture was the controversial philosophy of J.J. Rousseau, who criticised the Enlightenment ideas of civilisation, glorifying the natural state. Representatives of German and British Romanticism, such as J. G. Herder, W. von Humboldt and A. Bastian, undertook polemics with Rousseau. Bastian proposed understanding culture as the 'psychic unity of mankind', gathering universal ideas (*Elementargedanken*), which within national cultures are accompanied by local ludic ideas (*Völkergedanken*) [Bastian 2009]. M. Arnold defined culture with the categories of civilisation order, juxtaposing it with anarchy, which was a reference to *Leviathan* by T. Hobbes [Matthew 1993]. In the second half of the 19th century, the Social Darwinism approach dominated the view on culture. The philosophy of H. Spencer and F. Galton, and L. H. Morgan's ideas of cultural evolution and religion evolution presented a distorted image of cultural development, from primitive to sophisticated forms, an example of which was supposed to be enlightened white Europeans being members of the power elite [Raymond 2000, p. 186-199]. In the 20th century, the cultural thread became the core problem of the social sciences and humanities, which is still relevant at the beginning of the 21st century.

First cultural trends in management

The cultural issues were not significant to management at the first stages of development back then. Representatives of the schools of scientific management and administration did not examine culture and did not theorise about it. In fact, both F. W. Taylor and H. Fayol assumed only some general cultural assumptions that, according to critics, consisted in consolidating the social structure and order (*status quo*) built around the new power-wielding class – technocratic managers (supervisors, directors) [Monin, Barry, Monin 2003, p. 377-401]. This was related to the 19th-century concept of elite culture, which today is often subject to critical, not always balanced judgements [Locke 1982, p.14-24]. F.W. Taylor began his *Principles of Scientific Management* with a patriotic call for undertaking work on 'national effectiveness', indirectly linking the categories of management to the national community and its cultural values [Taylor 1911]. H. Fayol moved even further towards variables related to culture, including *esprit de corps*, among his management rules; this 'team spirit' was supposed to be a source of harmony and cooperation. It seems

that the *esprit de corps* concept might be considered as a pioneer concept of organisational culture, or a pre-cultural concept in management [Fayol 1917].

Interest in cultural processes increased with the school of social relations, the originator of which is commonly believed to be E. Mayo. Using the results of the famous Hawthorne experiment, Mayo noted meaning in management: a workers' team, understood as a group based on a social bond, feedback between subordinates and superiors, effective and individual leadership [Sonnenfeld 1985, p. 125], sensitivity to the employees' emotions and soft skills training [Dubrin 2007, p. 2]. What links Mayo's and Roethlisberger's concepts to the cultural current is the attention to values within a social group and the social nature of the process of management. In the Hawthorne experiment, workers adjusted their pace of work and involvement less to individual reward systems, and more to the mutual social relations, values and norms they believed in. Mayo also noticed that management is not a purely technical process (social engineering), but mostly one of social and psychological influence. This was criticism of a hard school of scientific management, which marginalised the social sphere of organisations [Anteby, Khurana: www.library.hbs.edu (28.07.2012)]. However, the school of social relations also included more compromises. H. S. Dennison developed a concept of relating managerial control, drawn from scientific management, to the workers' needs and social group dynamics, which is a subject of the school of social relations [Kyle, Dennison, Mayo 2006, p. 177-199]. Ideas similar to organisational culture also appeared in the interwar period in the works of the psychologists and sociologists un-related to the school of social relations, such as K. Lewin, R. Lippitt and R.K. White (social climate) [Lewin, Lippitt, White 1939, p. 271-301], which indicates that this was the time when the issue reached the point where more in-depth analyses could be carried out.

Paradigms and schools

Before the Second World War, the maturation process of cultural issues in management took place in a context of the quick development of the functionalist and interpretative theory of culture. Due to tragic historical experiences of the 20th century, the simplified and racist 19th century vision of culture in the form of Social Darwinism was rejected. Cultural anthropology was derived from universalist perspectives in culture research, but gradually reached cultural relativism. A similar process, sometimes called a 'linguistic breakthrough' or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, took place in linguistics and sociology [Sapir 2002]. The other epistemological axis of analysis remained the

issue of cultural universalism. Some researchers, mostly from the school of F. Boas, and then R. Benedict and M. Mead, were in favour of the particularism approach, which worked in accordance with the assumptions of symbolic interactionism, proving that cultures form 'wholes' as such (*gestalt*¹) and cannot be generalised in research [Boas 1940, Mead 1928, p. 298, Benedict 1934]. The line of cultural universalists was also developed by functionalist, and then structuralist schools looking for the universals of culture. The most important representatives of structural functionalism were B. Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and E.E. Evans-Pritchard [Malinowski, Hill, Carolina

1944; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Evans-Pritchard 1940]. Thus, already before the Second World War, two opposing epistemological perspectives had formed within the social sciences: interpretivism, postulating cultural relativism and particularism, and functional structuralism, based on cultural universalism and realism. This opposition was maintained in the following decades in the form of the opposition between structuralism [Levi-Strauss 1958, Parsons 1st edition, p. 120] and post-structuralism [Barthes 1967, Lacan 1977, Foucault 1975]. At the turn of the 1960s and the 1970s, the dominant paradigms in cultural anthropology were the interpretative-symbolic and post-structuralist approaches reflected in the words of C. Geertz, who said that people are entangled in webs of meaning that are of their own making, and examining culture is an interpretative science, consisting in looking for meanings [Geertz 1973, p. 5]. In the understanding of culture, relativism and particularism take the form of post-structuralism, and then postmodernism, which is expressed in the development of cultural studies. In the 1970s, thanks to S. Hall [Hall, Walton 1972] and R. Williams [Williams 1981; Williams 2005], a neo-Marxist critical current of cultural research crystallises, using the assumptions of radical structuralism. It makes use of the intellectual base of the Frankfurt School, P. Bourdieu's sociology, radical feminism and the neo-Marxism of A. Gramsci and L. Althusser, developing a method of critical cultural studies which analyses culture in an involved way as a source of inequality, violence and a method of preserving the unjust *status quo* [Bourdieu 1965].

One of the key sources of the development of the culture theory was an increase in the significance of intercultural contacts related to the development of communication techniques, and then to the progressing globalisation process. Many organisations which function in an international context met specific problems of intercultural management. A great cultural challenge of the second half of the 20th century was also decolonisation and globalisation. This is why,

¹ A term drawn from gestalt psychology meaning 'the whole' – D. Hothersall, *History of Psychology*, McGraw Hill, chapter seven, 2004

comparative intercultural research began to quickly develop as early as in the 1930s, serving the pragmatic of reducing communication problems and conflicts in intercultural communication. One pioneer of intercultural research was G. P. Murdock, who conducted the first comparative statistical studies of cultural behaviour [Murdock 1967]. The key figure in the development of a pragmatic current in intercultural research was E. T. Hall, who gained intercultural competence through consulting work for the American administration [Hall 1959]. The concepts of cultural dimensions and disparities [Hall 1976] became the subject of other research, leading to projects which were fundamental to the cultural current in management, conducted by G. Hofstede and other researchers assuming the cross-cultural perspective [Hofstede 1994].

Theory of culture in management

The birth of organisational culture theory as such took place after the Second World War. E. Jacques used this expression mostly in relation to the analysis of a workplace atmosphere (organisational climate) [Jaques 1951]. In the 1950s and the 1960s, there was little research into culture in management, and it was treated as a marginal issue. The main current of research was connected with the relationships between culture and change [Adams 1951, pp. 185-189; Davis 1967, p. 3-21], organisation development [Gouldner 1960, p. 468-490; Bidwell 1957, p. 163-181], leadership [Bordua, Reiss, Command, 1966, p. 68-76; Argyris, 1954] and human resources management [Friedlander, Margulies 1969, Adams 1951, p. 185-189]. For example, A. Bavelas, analysing organisational change, also referred it to 'organisation-specific culture' which is distinguished by, among others, rituals which influence the process of adaptation of new employees [Bavelas 1948, p. 48-52]. Thus, for two decades, cultural issues in management developed in two currents: on the one hand, a functionalist and narrowed understanding of culture as organisational climate [Argyris 1958, p. 501-520], and on the other, a comparative research into cultures developed [Oberg 1963, p. 129-143; Hall, Whyte, p. 5-12]. Already at this stage, epistemological reflection on management appeared, leading to a diagnosis of multiplicity and incoherence within the theory of culture and organisation [Roberts 1970, p. 327-350].

Starting in the 1970s, comparative intercultural research developed, a large part of which was related to managerial problems. There was an especially rapid increase in the number of publications after 1980 – the year of publication of G. Hofstede's first book containing results of comparative research into cultures, which were widely implemented by management everywhere [Hofstede 1980]. A number of intercultural comparative projects appeared, exploring different

aspects of organisation, starting from the relations between culture and effectiveness, through leadership, to change management. The pragmatic current of intercultural management initiated by E. T. Hall resulted in a number of methods improving competence and training programmes [Fiedler, Terence, Harry 1971; Gudykunst, Hammer, Wiseman 1977, pp. 99–110]. Apart from the scientific work, there were also more and more business guides taking intercultural issues into consideration [Van Zandt 1970]. The whole comparative research model is based on functionalist assumptions and makes use of standardised and representative survey methods. Also today, it is a very important current of cultural research, both in management and other social sciences. The most significant researchers include G. Hofstede, A. Trompenaars and C. Hampden-Turner, R. House and R. Inglehart [Hofstede 1984; Hampden-Turner, A. Trompenaars 1998; House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla 1997, p. 215–254; Inglehart 1997]. At the moment, issues concerning globalisation and multiculturalism are key to the current of comparative intercultural research.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the concept of organisational culture also became more important. This was probably a result of a number of elements, related both to the logics of the development of cultural discourse in management as such, and to external factors. A rapid increase in interest in comparative intercultural studies drew the attention of numerous management researchers and practitioners to the increasing role of intercultural communication. As a result of globalisation and the opening of a number of economies that previously tended to be autarkic, managers became commonly interested in cultural issues. G. Hofstede believes that one of the reasons for the explosion of the issues related to organisational culture is the confrontation between American and Japanese models of conducting business and all the intercultural problems this entails [Hofstede 1986, p. 253–257]. An important experience for American business was their shock at how competitive Japanese products are on the American market. The Japanese, although their management models are radically different, being based on collectivism which is the opposite of the American belief in individualism, achieve spectacular success in business. Thus, the myth of American management understood as *one best way* was debunked and substituted by the awareness that organisation is culture-conditioned. Another reason is the increase in the popularity of cultural research within the social sciences and humanities, related to new, sometimes completely different perspectives on the understanding of culture (like postmodernism and socio-biology). The theory of organisation and management witnessed slow exhaustion of the possibility of applying a systemic perspective, which at first did not even include culture as a sub-system [Sułkowski 2001]. At first, many management specialists thought that culture would be a remedy to the

problems of theory and practice of management. Research and publications which assumed a broad, functionalist understanding of organisational culture became very popular among both theoreticians and practitioners. A large number of authors use the approach to organisational culture as an internal variable including, for example, E. Schein, C. Handy, T. Deal and A. Kennedy, P. Bate, A. Pettigrew [Deal, Kennedy 1982; Handy 1999], as well as the key representative of the current of comparative intercultural research – G. Hofstede. Some of Hofstede's concepts of organisational culture, such as 'the iceberg' [Selfridge, Sokolik 1975, p. 46-61; French, Bell 1979] or 'the onion model', became so popular that they spread to broad public opinion thanks to popular literature [Hofstede 1994]. The peak of their popularity was a bestseller by T. Peters and P. Waterman, which placed the values of organisation in the centre of the proposed '7S model' [Peters, Waterman 1982]. The dominant functionalist approach to culture assumed that it can be changed with the use of organisational techniques. This optimistic approach to the issue of cultural changes was verified by practice, with many experiences of the programmes of culture transformation often leading to surprising results. Culture, later also in the opinion of some researchers whose starting point was functionalism, turned out to be too amorphous and poorly known to become the basis for the development of a management theory understood in neopositivist terms.

Alternative paradigms of culture in management

A reflection of the increasing scepticism concerning the functionalist perspective on culture was the development of interpretative-symbolic perspective. Researchers such as G. Morgan, G. Burrell and L. Smircich proposed viewing organisation from the perspective of culture understood interpretatively [Smircich 1983, pp. 339-59; Morgan 2006]. This approach used the output of the symbolical interactionism paradigm in sociology, cultural anthropology and other social sciences to describe the phenomenon of organisational culture. This meant focusing on understood anthropologically, individual and un-generalised case studies, which were supposed to grasp the meaning of organisation. Researchers using the concepts related to the interpretative current of understanding culture are: L. Smircich [Smircich 1983, pp. 339-59], N. Brunsson, J. Van Maanen, M. Pacanowsky, G. Morgan, M.J. Hatch, I.L. Mangham, M.A. Overington, C. Eden, C. Ouellet, P. Cossette [Ouellet, Cossette 1999]. With time, the interpretative current became very diversified in its interests, incorporating the works of organisation researchers who previously had not focused on the theory of culture in management, such as K. Weick [Daft, Weick 1984, pp. 284-295].

Another cultural current, which appeared in management as a result of inspirations from the humanities, was postmodernism. Postmodernists extensively criticised functionalist, universalist and objectivist perspectives on culture, proposing instead the concept of a non-fundamentalist discourse based on methodological anarchy. The flagship postmodernist ideas, such as deconstruction, simulacra and meta-narrations became very popular. Some authors also used popular metaphors of organisational culture, such as theatre, root and Panopticon [Deleuze, Guattari 1972; Foucault 1995]. Following the precursors of postmodernism and postmodern philosophers, such as M. Foucault, P. Feyerabend, R. Rorty, and J.F. Lyotard, attempts at objectivist research into culture were criticised, and the ideas of cultural imperialism of modern science were raised. Postmodernism is an anti-methodological orientation, and rare attempts at using postmodern methods included deconstruction and glossing, both being more essay-writing than scientific work. Some authors who were previously interested in non-fundamentalist and anti-functionalist approaches to organisational culture became postmodernists, including S. Clegg, G. Burrell, R. Cooper, B. Czarniawska-Jorges, M. Kostera, M.J. Hatch P. Engholm, D.M. Boje, R.P., Jr, Gephart, T.J. Thatchenkery [Engholm 2001, Boje, Gephart Jr, Thatchenkery 1996, Welge, Holtbrugge 1999, p. 305-322, Burrell, Cooper 1998, p. 91-112]. Moreover, many researchers and practitioners used metaphors and other concepts set in postmodernism. From the point of view of management science as a whole, postmodernism did not become a significant current. However, it is worth noting its presence in the cultural current of management. In management, postmodernism is often confused with the interpretative approach and the critical current, while differences between them are very important and concern both epistemological and methodological spheres. More about the differences between non-functionalist paradigms in cultural research can be found in the following chapters. Radical postmodernism was heavily (and in most cases justly) criticised by the academic environment due to its irrationality, epistemological relativism, lack of strict scientific discipline and conceptual vagueness [Chomsky on Post-Modernism, <http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/chomsky-on-postmodernism.html>, 10.08.2012; Sokal, Bricmont, 1998]. As a result, postmodernism slowly withered in science, including the cultural discourse. Some researchers believe that a loss of significance in the case of postmodernism also means an increase in the significance of realistic approaches to culture in management [Reed 2005, p. 1621-1644].

The most recent current of research into cultural processes in organisation is the critical perspective (Critical Management Studies – CMS), although it has its roots deep in the past. By the 19th century, K. Marx had already described the

exploitation of workers in capitalist factories and bourgeois culture built on this basis. CMS representatives draw from neo-Marxism, the works of the Frankfurt School and radical feminism. G. Morgan, in his images of organisation, describes a metaphor of organisation interpreted as a 'mental prison', quoting a number of currents that are critical of the dominant business culture: opposition to dehumanisation, a lack of responsibility, exploitation of poor countries by rich ones, a lack of corporate social responsibility, wasteful exploitation of natural resources and destruction of ecosystems [Morgan 2006]. According to the representatives of the critical current, all these problems of the exploratory culture of modern business are system-conditioned and are not individual cases. Culture, in the understanding of the radical current, is a power-wielding tool. The first author who undertook the issue of organisational culture from the critical perspective in 1993 was M. Willmott, who described organisational culture as a kind of ideology, false awareness, psychomanipulation and social engineering, the aim of which is to maintain the *status quo* in the form of workers' exploitation [Willmott 1993, p. 515-552]. The following years saw publications by M. Alvesson, D. Knights, J. Brewis, J. Gavin, A. Prasad, which elaborated on the critical view of culture in management [Alvesson, Willmott 1996; Knights, Willmott 1987, p. 40-63].

Summary

Culture management is an important issue and at the same time open all the time, both in terms of theory and practice. The essence of the problem is related to the importance of the organization as a whole. Culture is a universal medium in which people operate, and in which organizations are immersed. It is the basis of all processes: communication, governance and evaluation, in the world of people and organizations. Culture also remains open and ambiguous phenomenon.

Cultural theory in management sciences is a reflection of cultural theory in science in general. Therefore, all the considerations of organizational culture or cross-cultural comparative research organization should be conducted in the context of cultural discourse in the social sciences and humanities.

Shaping the organizational culture brings axiological aspects, aesthetic and praxeological. It is evaluative activities, carrying ethical and moral content. Building identity of organizations around specific values carries implications for all stakeholders. The key is to answer questions about the development the values and norms taking into account social responsibility, sustainable development orientation and the personal treatment of employees and other stakeholders.

Axiology of organizational culture is associated with the implementation of the idea of “good” and the aesthetics focuses on art and the idea of “beauty”. Aesthetics is the key to understanding the culture, which is also activity related to the creation of beautiful or its antithesis. It is difficult, therefore, to state that the organizational culture which is the derivative of culture would be completely devoid of aesthetic ideals. Aesthetic topics, though still marginal in management, are more likely to occur precisely in relation to organizational culture. Anthropology of organizations becomes increasingly a canvas representing a kind of documentary texts that create an organizational literature. Creating organizational stories and role plays and performances is used in the diagnosis of culture [Brown, Denning, Groh, Prusak 2005; Rosen 1991, p. 1-24].

Praxeology of organizational culture is focused on the analysis of organizational culture from the viewpoint of the efficiency of the function. It is linked to the practical nature of the problem, which may differ the study of organizational culture from the analysis of culture in general. Cultural studies do not need to be oriented praxeologically, culture and research, at least those which are the subject of management studies should.

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